Maine Connectivity Authority

Jumpstart Connectivity Concept

The MCA is launching a pilot program to trial and evaluate where and how non-wired (wireless) technologies and service models can help jump-start connectivity in remote and rural locations. This initiative dubbed "Jumpstart Connectivity" is launching in May 2022 with the intent to select 3-4 projects that utilize a variety of technologies and models such as fixed wireless, community broadband radio service (cbrs), low earth orbit satellite (leo), and hybrid services.

MCA intends to fund these efforts with support from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Program both to provide accelerated connectivity to places where there aren't other viable solutions and to evaluate overall effectiveness of different technologies and service models. The goal is to trial technologies that will be rapidly deployed in priority areas and that will potentially scale as a component of the State's overall connectivity strategy.

Context

The Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) was created to **proactively provide all Mainers access to affordable and reliable high speed internet as soon as possible.**

The organization is building out a comprehensive strategy to make the most of Federal and State funding to **address immediate needs as well as address the long term opportunity** enabled by an infusion of an unprecedented capital infusion enabled through federal recovery and infrastructure funding. To achieve this mandate the MCA will:

1. **Ensure rural areas have access** to connectivity through a diversity of technologies.
2. Decrease the costs and barriers to **provide affordable and reliable last mile connectivity**.
3. Ensure every place is **ready for investment to benefit everyone**.

The Jumpstart Concept advances the MCA's Strategic Summary to "Reach the last mile" through efforts to: *Evaluate "alternatives" strategy to provide connectivity for targeted locations; Establish methodology for identifying and evaluating interventions to support "remote and rural locations and; Identify projects and partnerships to evaluate lifetime costs, deployment time*

Problem

Providing broadband service in remote, rural locations can be challenging as distance and low population density make for a difficult business case for any for-profit internet service provider. (Costs increase due to distance and potential revenue is constrained due to fewer people.)

While Fiber optic cable represents the gold-standard for enabling access to long lasting, affordable broadband - there are locations in Maine where access to fiber will be limited due to distance, available material, community demand and existing service providers. As a result

speed-to market deployment of new advancements in satellite and fixed wireless in newly available licensed spectrums need to be evaluated.

Guiding Principles

Ensuring internet connectivity in rural locations through wireless solutions can enable internet access for hard to reach areas and serve as a catalyst for building out long term and strategic infrastructure. The Maine Connectivity Authority has an opportunity to trial innovative partnerships and projects to address this balance and will be guided by the following principles:

1. Speed to Market: MCA needs to ensure all Mainers - especially in rural areas can get connectivity as soon as possible
2. Scale matters. A diversity of technology solutions need to be embraced and evaluated
3. Innovation and iteration. Trial and evaluation of various technologies ensures a robust and comprehensive strategy.
4. Technology evolves. Deployment of non-wired services should not prevent future connectivity investments

Process

Since February 2022, MCA staff have engaged a diversity of service providers, technology experts, academic institutions and state agencies to outline a pilot program that addresses the goals and priorities outlined above.

Starting in May 2022, MCA will request applications to launch the Jumpstart Connectivity Initiative to provide accelerated low-cost internet access to the least served areas of the state by subsidizing pilot wireless technology deployments. Target areas are those where service level is estimated to be below 25/3 mbps and where wired deployments are currently impractical.

Selection of pilots will be based on preference for projects that provide service in areas that are least likely to receive commercial investment. Key partners include: Maine Department of Transportation - Intelligent Transportation Systems group, The Maine Office of Information Technology, Presidio Technologies, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Public Radio and others.

The MCA intends to provide funding for between 2 and 4 pilot projects with a total budget of up to $2M. All funded projects will provide internet service to potential subscriber locations using wireless technology for middle and/or last mile access. Applications will be accepted in early June 2022 with announcements anticipated by mid July 2022.

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